

Analyzing Gastronomy Influencers' Views About Gastronomy Tourism

Selin İŞEVCAN ERTAMAY¹
Mehmet Emre GÜLER²

Received: 06.05.2024, Accepted: 30.06.2024
DOI Number: 10.5281/zenodo.13934592

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing interest towards gastronomic tourism worldwide. The unique gastronomic offerings of a destination are getting a pivotal attraction for travelers. This qualitative research aims to explore the perspectives of Turkish gastronomy influencers on gastronomy tourism considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic through in-depth interviews and provide an assessment the effect of pandemic on gastronomy tourism and explore future trends and potential strategies for the revival of gastronomy tourism after pandemic. Employing the MAXQDA software program, the qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis with systematically condensing extensive text data into organized summaries of key findings. The findings demonstrate an understanding to determine what needs to stay the same and what needs to change after Covid-19 in order to promote the revival of gastronomy tourism. Findings highlights safety and socio-psychological needs of tourists, the role of social media, critics in adaptation to technology, new trends and economic conditions, emphasizing the growing demand for local and authentic experiences. The original aspect of this research is that it presents a holistic perspective by investigating influencers' views on all aspects and future of gastronomy tourism, considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Gastronomy Tourism, Social Media, Social Media Influencer, Covid -19

JEL Code: L83

¹ PhD Candidate, Selin İşevcan Ertamay, İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Turkey, sisevcan@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9892-621X>

² Prof., PhD, Mehmet Emre Güler, İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Turkey, memre.guler@ikcu.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8689-9859>

* This study is extracted from a Graduate Thesis titled “Analyzing Gastronomy Influencers' Views About Gastronomy Tourism”

1. Introduction

The growth on global tourism has led to an increase in competition among travel destinations and local cuisine, now gastronomy play a pivotal role in enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2017). In recent years, there has been a notable rise in worldwide gastronomic tourism. It has become a widespread trend to travel specifically for food experiences, which emerged as an alternative form of tourism in the 1990s and has gained importance in many countries. Food has historically served as a means of informal and diplomatic interaction, bringing people together at dining tables. Throughout the history, it was a powerful tool for diplomacy even wars and peace were decided around the dining tables. Even today, wherever you journey, one of the most enduring memories of your destination is likely to be its culinary culture. The unique gastronomic offerings of a place are a pivotal attraction for travelers. Gastronomic experiences provide an opportunity to gain insights into the historical and cultural aspects of a destination. Current literature highlights the rising importance of gastronomy in tourism (Smith & Costello, 2009) and Ottenbacher and Harrington (2013) underscore its strategic role in tourism development. Scholars (Rand et al., 2003; Selwood, 2003; Hall and Mitchell, 2005) highlight the growing importance of food in global tourism while studies (Hall et al., 2003; Mitchell and Hall, 2003) state cuisine as a primary factor in influencing travel behavior and decision-making. Gastronomic brand value is now integral to overall destination attractiveness (Bessiere, 1998; Bessière, 2001; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Long, 2004; Güneş et al., 2008; Karim and Chi, 2010; Chevrier, 2011; Sanchez and Lopez-Guzma, 2012; Okumus et al., 2013). Today, social media plays a significant role in our daily routines and social interactions. Similarly, it is one of the key tools in the tourism industry today, allows internet users to connect, communicate, and build relationships on Web 2.0 platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Tourists might become interested in a destination or a gastronomic occasion after a post encountered on social media platforms. It has transformed word of mouth (WOM) into electronic word of mouth (EWOM), thanks to enhanced networking and sharing capabilities (Lo McKercher et al., 2011). A relatively recent concept in this field is that of 'social media influencers,' who wield the power to directly impact audiences through their posts their influence grows through the network of their followers (Allué, 2013; Levis and Phillipov, 2018; Weber et al., 2021; Soltani et al., 2021; Godara and Dev, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Lupton, 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2022; Gajic et al., 2021; Vukolic, 2022; Puspita, 2020; Mainolfi et al., 2021).). Social media influencers have risen to popularity due to the widespread use of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Weibo (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Influencers who are successful in influencing customer purchase behavior, also show activity in the field of gastronomy. They can keep tourists informed about various destinations, festivals, local markets, and recently established restaurants while some also actively engaging in gastronomy by reviewing the ambiance, food quality, staff, and service

standards during their travels or private visits (Gonzalez Vaque, 2020). Scholars (Allué, 2013; Willers & Schmidt, 2017; Puspita, 2020; Soltani et al., 2021; Gajic et al., 2021; Godara and Dev, 2021; Ingrassia et al., 2022; and Vukolic, 2022) highlight the importance of social media influencers in gastronomy tourism development. COVID-19 pandemic significantly elaborated the entire tourism industry in a negative way including gastronomy tourism. The pandemic led to changes in the motivations and needs of gastronomy tourists and forced industry players to adjust their business strategies, adopting new operational and technological approaches in order to survive and meet evolving tourist requirements. Throughout the pandemic, social media emerged as a crucial platform for people to communicate, share vacation memories, and seek inspiration for future travels (Gretzel et al., 2020). Particularly during curfews, social media and smartphone usage increased, and influencers with food or fitness experience have grown in popularity (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). In current literature, there are studies exploring the impacts of Covid-19 on gastronomy tourism such as consumer perceptions of digital food-related experiences (Cenni et al., 2020); consumer preference for private dining facilities (Kim and Lee, 2020); consumer behavior in online food ordering (Brewer and Sebby, 2021); restaurant managers' attitudes towards food delivery platforms (Türkeş et al., 2021); use of social as a service innovation during lockdown by high-profile restaurants (Tuomi et al., 2021). These studies examine either the early-stage effects of the pandemic or the effects of the pandemic on a specific area of gastronomy tourism. Therewithal, studies are recent exploring the evolution of gastronomy tourism in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. These include examinations of COVID-19's impact on gastronomy tourist consumer behavior (Durmaz et al., 2022), a conceptual analyze of Covid 19 impact on gastronomy tourism (Ostrowska-Tryzno and Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2022); restaurateurs' perceptions of changing customer needs in post-COVID-19 (Bonfanti et al., 2023); factors affecting the satisfaction level of gastronomy tourist post-COVID-19 (Thanasegaran & Chandrashekar, 2023). This research aims to present a comprehensive analyze and future perspectives about gastronomy tourism in the late Covid-19 and beyond through the views of gastronomy influencers considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on gastronomy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gastronomy Tourism

The term "gastronomic tourism" was introduced by geographer Wilbur Zelinsky in 1985 while studying ethnicities in restaurants in the United States and Canada (Zelinsky, 1985; Long, 2012). The relationship between food and tourism is highlighted in the current literature through a variety of terms. Some common terms 'food tourism' (Hall and Sharples, 2003), 'culinary tourism' (Ignatov and Smith, 2006), 'gastronomy tourism' (Wolf, 2006), 'tasting tourism' all emphasizing the intersection of food and travel interests, including beverage-related experiences (Boniface, 2003). Mitchell and Hall (2004) argue just dining in a restaurant doesn't

qualify as a food tourism activity; instead, it must involve travel motivated by a desire to experience a particular type of food, a regional produce, or the tastes of a specific chef. When food is part of a trip experience, it turns an experiential issue rather than functional, symbolic, and ceremonial, and gains a new significance and meaning for many people. Moreover, food is among the most enjoyable activities within tourist activities during holidays (Okumus et al. 2007) and can be the main reason for tourists to visit a specific destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006), or second reason for travel (Sánchez-Cañizares, López-Guzmán 2012). Currently, many destinations use gastronomy as a touristic product that serves to differentiate the destination and with each day an increasing number of tourists travel with the motivation of gastronomy (Hall, 2020). This includes promoting local cuisine, food rituals, gastronomic routes, themed events, and concept restaurants (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). For many tourists, dining out during a vacation holds a special meaning that goes beyond a physical need. It becomes a sensory and symbolic experience, elevating sensory awareness and creativity during the vacation (Mitchell and Hall, 2004). According to Ryu and Jang (2006) prior experiences with local foods positively influence tourists' intentions to try them, and local food experiences enhance destination appeal. Positive culinary experiences attract tourists with prior destination familiarity, forming their opinions and inspire them to share positive impressions, influencing their eating habits and preferences through cherished memories (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Gastronomic experiences not only satisfy tourists' culinary desires but also contribute to sustainable destination development by promoting environmental awareness, preserving, and developing regional identity, and raising awareness about sustainability (Everett&Aitchison, 2008; Knowd, 2006; Rinaldi, 2017). Consequently, gastronomy tourism is a rapidly growing area of niche tourism in the world (Rand et al., 2003; Selwood, 2003; Hall and Mitchell, 2005) and gastronomy is a pivotary pull factor for destinations (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Smith & Costello, 2009) leading governments to revive or devise traditional recipes and even cuisines as they regard having a suigenaris national cuisine as a powerful tool in fostering their tourism industry (Hall, 2020).

2.2. Gastronomy Tourism and Social Media

In today's digital age, one of the most important online means used in tourism industry is considered as social media as a group of online platforms, exist on the Web 2.0 platform that provides internet users the opportunity to engage, communicate, and create relationships (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Travelers' experiences and opinions shared on various online platforms significantly influence the branding of the destinations. The internet's global reach has expanded its role in communication and destination promotion (Wan, 2002; Rand et al., 2003). The widespread use of smartphones and other digital devices has amplified the influence of digital marketing. Travelers now prefer social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor, YouTube, and Instagram to traditional media for sharing content, experiences, and emotional connections through stories, comments, photos, and videos (Koban, 2020). Social media posts play a significant role in all stages of trip planning, including pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel

(Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Visual content, user comments, and recommendations play a crucial role in travelers' decision-making processes, particularly when exploring gastronomic offerings of a destination. (Yücel Güngör et al., 2016; Çelik and Aksoy, 2017). Culinary posts on social media entice individuals to try the featured dishes, fostering two-way interactions that influence perceptions (Hanan and Karim, 2015).

Due to the widespread use of social media platforms social media influencers have recently gained popularity (Xu and Pratt, 2018). Literally, influencer is defined as "someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave" (Cambridge, 2021). These professional social media users, who are typically ordinary individuals, create content centered on their everyday lives and experiences, offering followers a seemingly authentic, unfiltered glimpse into their personal lives (Abidin, 2015). They generate a buzz around the information they provide and encourage their followers to share it (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). They share daily life experiences, offering seemingly unfiltered glimpses into their personal lives, often integrating promotional content, engaging their audience through varied content formats (Abidin, 2015). Influencers are categorized into micro (1,000–10,000 followers, 25–30% engagement), macro (10,000–1 million followers, 5–25% engagement), and mega influencers (over 1 million followers, 2–5% engagement) based on their follower count and engagement rates (Asan & Yolal, 2022). The emergence of social media influencers has further amplified the influence of digital platforms on tourism. Influencer marketing is now a growing trend in tourism promotion due to its success in stimulating demand for destinations (Gretzel, 2017). Influencers, regarded as trustworthy sources, use social media to influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Tuten, 2008). Peer to peer electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is more persuasive than traditional marketing, with messages from fellow consumers considered as more credible and reliable than commercial advertisements (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers shaping consumer buying decisions also engage in the field of gastronomy, utilizing their travels or visits to assess the restaurant's atmosphere, cuisine, staff, and service quality. They engage with the business they visit and share the culinary experiences from the kitchen to the dining table where possible. Thus, social media became a primary means of communication and connection for individuals when physical tourism came to a standstill during the Covid-19, enabling them to share vacation memories and motivations (Gretzel et al., 2020). Moreover, during curfews, social media usage increased and influencers specializing in food and fitness gained popularity. Throughout the pandemic, their content played a significant role in shaping online discussions and it is anticipated that it will continue to have an impact on travelers' choices during the recovery phase. (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). This research aims to assess the impacts of pandemic on gastronomy tourism and foresee future trends in gastronomy tourism to recover from the negative effects of pandemic in line with social media influencers' views.

3. Research Methodology

Purposive sampling method was employed, and the participants were determined among Turkish gastronomy influencers whose knowledge and experience are extensive in gastronomy tourism. This sampling is two folded; influencers inherently function as tourists, offering objective evaluations of gastronomy tourism, and their capacity to influence a wide audience was significant. Research data was collected through semi-structured interviews, consisting of 12 open-ended questions and six demographic questions. The interview questions were adapted from the studies in the literature (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2005; Harms et al., 2021; Bucak and Yiğit, 2021; Sigala, 2020; Farmaki et al., 2020; Alonso et al., 2020; Richards, 2020). Academics who are experts in their fields reviewed the interview form, and three pilot interviews were conducted to ensure question clarity. A total of 50 gastronomy influencers were initially approached but 22 of them were interviewed. Some did not respond to the interview request, and some could not be agreed on a date of an interview. In-depth interviews were conducted between January and February 2022 lasting 30 to 50 minutes. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Izmir Kâtip Çelebi University (IKCU) [2021/23-14; issued on 28/12/2021]. Voice and screen recordings of interviews were collected with participants' consent, transcribed by the researchers, and analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative research software. The analysis was conducted in Turkish, and subsequently, the findings were translated into English for the manuscript. The qualitative content analysis involved systematically condensing extensive text data into organized summaries of key findings. The analysis occurred in four stages: progressing raw data to meaningful materials and coding, developing themes, categorizing codes and themes, and analyzing findings (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017; Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2017). Two independent academicians were involved in assessing the study's validity and reliability by coding and categorizing interview data. Discrepancies in their results, compared to the researcher's, were resolved through consensus. "Content validity" was used to assess validity (Bilgin, 2000:13). During the interviews, participants were encouraged to express their thoughts openly without leading questions. The transcription of raw data aimed to provide academics with extensive material for thorough analysis. The data collection adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality through participant codes (P1, P2, P3, etc.). The relevance of codes and themes to future tourism foresight was examined through current literature.

4. Findings

4.1. Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the corporate profiles of the participants. The participants, engaged in diverse occupations, share a common motivation for being gastronomy influencer, driven by a passion for gastronomy rather than commercial interests.

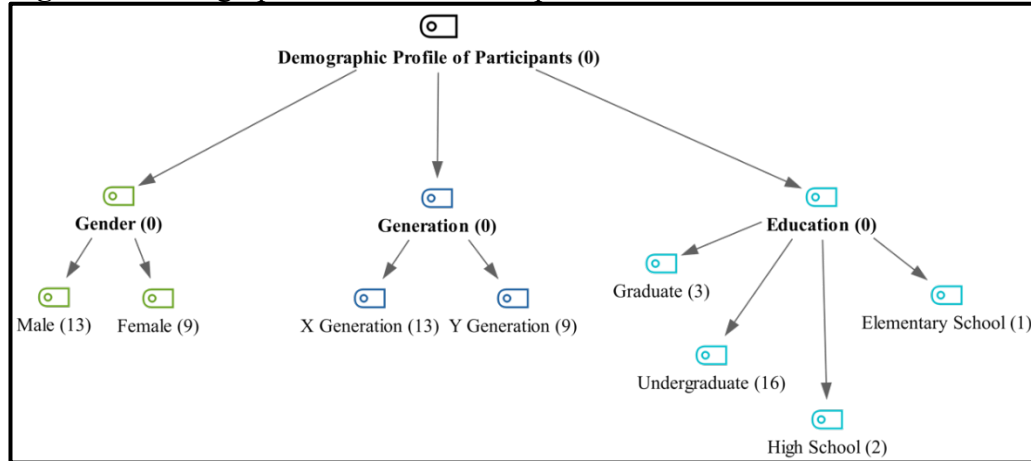
Table 1. Corporate Profile of Participants

Participant	Profession	Motivation for Being an Influencer
P1	Freelance	Hobby
P2	Entrepreneur	Hobby
P3	Owner of a Street Food Brand	Hobby
P4	Columnist	Hobby
P5	Chef , Cooking Tv, Show Host	Sharing experiences and knowledge
P6	Columnist	Sharing experiences and knowledge
P7	Columnist	Role model to her daughter
P8	Chef	Interact of experiences and knowledge
P9	Gastronomy Travel Guide, Lecturer	Promoting Turkish Culinary Culture
P10	Columnist, Creative Director	Interact of experiences
P11	Food Engineer	Hobby
P12	Instructor Chef	Trendsetter
P13	Chef	Interact of professional knowledge
P14	Mixologist	Interact of professional knowledge
P15	Chef	Interact of experiences
P16	Graphic Artist	Documentary
P17	Lawyer	Interact of experiences
P18	Chef, Restaurant Owner	Interact of experiences
P19	Chef, Restaurant Owner	Interact of experiences
P20	Social Media Consultant	Interact of knowledge
P21	Chef, Restaurant Owner	Interact of experiences
P22	Mechanical Engineer	Interact of experiences

Source: Compiled by the authors

The demographic profile of participants categorized by gender, generations, and educational is illustrated in Figure 1. Gender of participants demonstrates a well-balanced distribution; female (n:9) male (n:13), participants from X generation (n:13) and Y generation (n:9). The educational levels of participants graduate (n:3), undergraduate(n:16), high school (n:2) and elementary school (n:1).

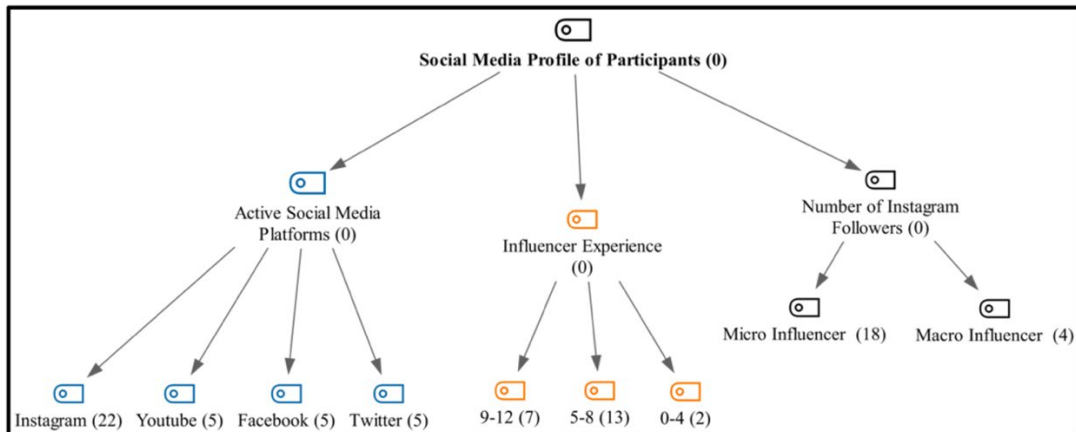
Figure 1. Demographic Profile of Participants



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 2 represents social media profile of the participants categorized by active social media platforms, influencer experience and number of followers. As all participants are users of Instagram, their categorization based on the number of followers on Instagram was conducted. Considering participants' social media experience and number of followers, it is anticipated that they possess a substantial level of experience and knowledge in gastronomy tourism.

Figure 2. Social Media Profile of Participants



Source: Compiled by the authors

4.2. Interview Findings

The outcomes of the interviews have been organized into nine main themes. Table 2 reports the frequency information concerning the themes and codes related to all aspects and the future of gastronomy tourism through the perspectives of Turkish gastronomy influencers, considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Table 2 quantifies the frequency each theme and its codes. The frequency of the

code indicates the importance of each code. Higher frequency means more importance (Maxqda, 2022).

Table 2. Frequency of themes and codes according to content analysis

Themes / Codes	Frequency	Themes / Codes	Frequency	Themes / Codes	Frequency
Theme 1: Impacts of Covid-19 on Gastronomy Tourism and Key Learnings	92	Theme 5: Gastronomy Tourism in New Normal	118	Theme 8: Recovery of Gastronomy Tourism	101
struggle and recession	23	on site experiences preference	25	Role of Gastronomy Tourism resources	42
increase in costs.	14	widespread use of tech applications & practices	18	adapting local	8
cooking at home	10	local food consumption tendency	18	government and authorities supply	8
acknowledgement importance of gastronomy	9	health safety measures	11	operational solutions for safe tourism	5
gastronomy tourism as a luxury segment	9	expensive	11	story telling	5
advances in delivery segment	9	sustainability	11	concepts of experience	4
sustainability	7	primary travel motivation	10	hospitality	4
product innovation & diversification	5	off- premises Consumption	8	traditional and authentic concepts	4
importance of local products	3	food scarcity	6	no need for Innovation	4
importance of industry experience	2			Role of Social Media	59
importance of customer satisfactin	1			motivating and encouraging	22
Theme 2: Gastronomy Tourist Motivations	70	Sub Theme 5-1 :Milestones of Covid-19	39	a trustable reference center	11
safety needs	27	Q/R Code	15	a powerful communication tool	10
socio-physiological needs	14	online gastronomy experiences	7	a valuable information source	10
demand for local	11	safe tourism certification	6	power of social media influence	6
cultural motivations	5	virtual gastronomy	4		
no change in motivations	4	innovative food delivery services	4		
other motivations	3	antibacterials	2		
demand for domestic tourism	3	ghost kitchens	1		
demand for other alternative tourism types	3				
Theme 3: Expansion of Technology Use	88	Theme 6: Gastronomy Tourism Supply in New Normal	52	Theme 9:Changes in Influencers' Practices During Covid-19	41
lasting technology applications(virtual gastronomy tourism, online gastronomy experiences, e-commerce)	31	suffer from economic recession	12	motivating,encouraging and supportive contents	10
barrier for gastronomy experinece	19	new restaurant concepts	13	home made recipes	9
a complement	14	new operational strategies	12	archive sharings	5
fait accompli adaptation to tech	12	changes in workforce structure	7	changes in sharing frequency	5
role of generations	12	new technological strategies	5	content sensitivity	5
		increase in supply quality	3	no change in contents	4
Theme 4: Business Model Innovations	42	Theme 7: Worries about Gastronomy Tourism Future	43	video postings rather than photo shootings	3
new menu formats	13	economic ressession	20		
innovative food delivery services	12	getting an expensive segment	7		
Q/R Code	11	shortage of qualified workforce	6		
ghost kitchens	3	lack of government support	4		
sustainable practices	3	handicaps of safety measures	3		
		no worries	3		

Source: Compiled by the authors

Participants highlighted various impacts of COVID-19 on gastronomy tourism, highlighting primary concerns such as economic recession and increased costs, along with key learnings gained from pandemic. They also pointed out a tendency towards home cooking & home delivery and transformation of gastronomy tourism to a luxury segment. However, amidst these challenges, they noted positive contributions such as product innovation, greater appreciation of sustainability practices and local products.

The pandemic has altered tourist's motivational priorities. According to the interviews, safety and socio-physiological motivations are to be a priority for post pandemic tourists and tourist will favorize gastronomic experiences in nature and local foods. According to some participants, economic crises may deter tourist to travel even they are willing to. In the meantime, some participants are of the opinion that the motivations of gastronomy will remain the same.

Research findings reveal divided opinions on the integration of technology in gastronomy tourism. While some support its spread, others argue that the genuine gastronomy experience is only possible in physical settings. Proponents of spread of technology in gastronomy tourism note that the pandemic has driven individuals' embracement of technology. Industry's adaptation to technology has risen with individuals' more engagement in e-commerce, virtual gastronomy tourism and online gastronomy experiences during the pandemic and the industry's adaption of technology would vary by cohorts. In response to the severe effects of COVID-19, enterprises introduced novel business models. According to the participants, among these novel business models, improved delivery services, Q/R code system, new menu formats such as regional, seasonal or one single item menu will sustain in the industry.

Participants' views on gastronomy tourism in new normal align with findings on other themes (Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 3, theme 4). In the new normal, participants agree on the inevitability of widespread technology use in gastronomy tourism. While some debate the necessity of in-person events for an authentic experience. There is an emphasis on the demand for local and sustainable food. It is expected gastronomy tourism would turn into an expensive tourism segment. Additionally, participants note a consumer preference for off-premises consumption like take-away or home delivery in new normal. The participants identified several key milestones of Covid-19 for gastronomy tourism listing the Q/R code as the most important milestone. Virtual gastronomy practices, safe tourism certification, and online gastronomy tourist experiences are the other noteworthy milestones.

According to participants, gastronomy tourism supply will be in effort to survive the economic downturn and prefer to remain cautious in their financial decisions. Especially the economic stagnation will be a barrier for new investments. Participants also mentioned the emerge of new restaurant concepts (i.e; single product restaurants, pop up restaurants, vegan restaurants) aiming to address changing motivations of gastronomy tourists and manage operational costs.

The shift of qualified workforce is a worrying issue for the industry. For the future of gastronomy tourism, most participants showed worries due to the economic recession. Participants states their concerns about the global rise in transportation, energy, and food expenses, as well as food scarcity, which could position gastronomy tourism as a luxury segment. Additionally, there are pessimistic insights about the shift of qualified workers to other industries. However, some participants remain optimistic about the industry's recovery.

This research examines the recovery stage of gastronomy tourism from two perspectives: the role of gastronomy tourism resources and the role of social media. Participants suggested that in the "new normal," gastronomy resources should introduce novelties to motivate gastronomy tourists. They emphasized the significance of local food and themes like authenticity, experience, storytelling, and

hospitality in motivating travelers to participate in gastronomy tourism in new normal. Participants also highlighted the necessity of governments and authorities support to industry during recovery period. These findings show consistency with the findings pertaining the changes in motivation, decision-making and behavior of gastronomy tourists after the pandemic, which were examined under the theme of Gastronomy Tourist Motivations (Theme 2). In terms of role of social media, participants mostly agree that influencers' posts make people curious and excited about gastronomic destinations and motivate them to travel there. Social media is seen as a powerful tool for communication, creating excitement, and being a trusted source. However, some participants worry of the degeneration is social media that effects its the credibility negatively.

Theme 9- Changes in Influencers' Communication and Engagement Practices During COVID-19 demonstrates how social media influencers adapted their social media posts during the pandemic's initial phase and lockdowns. Participants primarily focused on aligning their actions with their followers' expectations, sharing motivating, encouraging, and supportive content. They included homemade recipes into their social media routines to foster a sense of togetherness. Participants were sensitive to the economic impact of the pandemic and avoided sharing recipes with expensive ingredients Mobility restrictions led many influencers to either repost older content or reduce their daily social media activity. However, some chose not to change their social media routines, maintaining their usual engagement practices throughout the pandemic.

MAXQDA Code Matrix Browser provides a systematic analysis to explore meanings, relationships and intersections across different themes and codes to make qualitative inferences. It provides a good comparison and interpretation of the relationships. The squares under the codes in the Code Relationships Browser display the frequency of relationships and intersections of the codes. The wider square shows higher intersection and relationship (Maxqda, 2022).

Figure 3. Code Matrix Browser

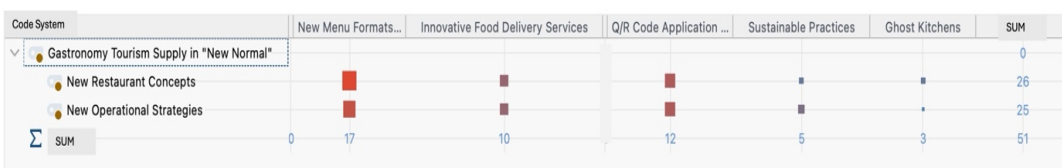


Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 3 demonstrates how the theme of "Extension of Technology Use" associated with sub codes of "Gastronomy Tourism in New Normal" (*on site experiences preference and widespread use of technological applications and practices*). The frequencies indicate areas of emphasis and potential challenges associated with technology in gastronomy tourism in new normal. "On Site Experiences Preference" highlights challenges and barriers associated with

technology adoption in gastronomy tourism. "Widespread Use of Technological Applications & Practices is prominent more on the lasting technology applications (virtual gastronomy tourism, online gastronomy experiences, e-commerce) and has the high frequency emphasizes on the sustainability and longevity of these technological applications. The role of generations is prominent in terms of preference for on-site experiences. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for gastronomy tourism suppliers in the adaptation of technological solutions to the new normal in gastronomy tourism. By so, they can be aware of challenges while leveraging technological solutions to enhance gastronomic experiences.

Figure 4: Code Matrix Browser



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 4 displays the association between the theme “Business Model Innovations” with the sub codes of "Gastronomy Tourism Supply in New Normal" (new restaurant concepts and new operational strategies). New menu formats, innovative food delivery services and Q/R code applications are relevant in both new restaurant concepts and operational strategies while the most frequent code is "New Menu Formats”, indicating a significant emphasis on innovation in menu offerings. Understanding these priorities offers a comprehensive insight for businesses in adapting to changing consumer preferences and operational costs within new normal.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides insights into the future of gastronomy tourism and suggestions for overcoming the negative effects of the pandemic through the views of gastronomy influencers. According to research results, gastronomy tourists prioritize safety and socio-psychological needs in new normal when planning their trips. This aligns with previous studies highlighting changes in consumer behavior during lockdowns and stay-at-home policies. Pandemic fatigued people both physically and emotionally yet individuals remain willing to explore new flavors and tastes while prioritizing hygiene standards, safety measures, social distance and reduced physical contact compared to pre-pandemic times (Durmaz et al., 2022). After the pandemic, a shift in consumer behavior within the gastronomy industry is anticipated. This includes novel food habits, changes in purchasing power, and movement patterns such as reluctance to visit crowded places due need for social distancing and hygiene precautions (Lai et al.; 2020). Our research findings highlight an increasing demand for local and traditional concepts from both the

perspective of demand and supply. Gastronomy tourists' demand for local food as a part of their willing for healthy diets and wellness, desire for cultural experience, novelty and sensory appeal can drive them to try local cuisine. Therefore, destination management organizations (DMOs) should focus their destination marketing efforts on highlighting cultural experiences, novelty, and sensory appeal (Dedeoglu et al., 2020). Our research findings align with the increasing significance of sustainability. According to UNWTO (2020), sustainability is recognized as the new normal in post-Covid recovery and the rebuilding tourism. Sustainability should no longer just as niche segment in the tourism industry, but rather regarded as the new standard for all aspects of tourism. Governments and the business community should urge to advance towards a tourism model that is more economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable. Gastronomy tourism, which has been previously announced as one of the key factors in international sustainable tourism and a dynamic power (UNWTO, 2017), plays a crucial role in this transformation. In recent years, gastronomy tourism has gained importance in the tourism industry as it not only showcases regional cuisines and local produce, but also promotes sustainable resources and raises awareness of local culture and traditions. The ability of gastronomic tourism to reflect regional identity, contribute to regional tourism development, preserve unique cultural heritage, and convey it on to future generations are all key factors that highlight the importance of gastronomy in the tourism industry. So, in new normal, gastronomy tourism can contribute to the tourism industry with a proactive and sustainable approach (Durmaz et al., 2022). This study affirms the power of social media, highlighting its positive impact on tourism movements thanks to its widespread popularity and ability to influence the masses. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant rise in the consumption of culinary content, especially among the younger generation. Individuals has gotten addicted to viewing food videos for diverse reasons including enjoyment, the need to adapt what they see to their own life, and the desire to live through other people (Godara and Dev, 2021). Social media platforms are useful in the development of gastronomy and tourism itself both before and after pandemic (Vukolic et al., 2022). For DMOs it is recommended to focus on sharing posts that showcase regional cuisine, which not only reflects the unique characteristics of local culture but also appeals to the desires for novelty and sensory experiences (Dedeoglu et al., 2020). Our research results indicate that technology will be more widespread in gastronomy tourism across various forms. Sarkady et al. (2021) highlight that tourists are increasingly embracing virtual reality as an alternative to traditional travel during and even after a pandemic and political or environmental instability may make tourists more likely to adopt new travel styles, including of virtual reality. Throughout the pandemic, digital tools gained increased relevance across industries including restaurant industry where there has been rise in the use of contactless payment methods or ordering systems. That also helps businesses to comply with contact limitations and hygiene requirements (Strotmann et al., 2021). The human factor plays a crucial role in the creation of moments of truth, customer satisfaction and loyalty which raises a question for the industry, whether technology-based practices like "untact tourism"

serve as a substitute for or a complement (Bae and Chang, 2021). Our research results also indicate that the real gastronomy experience can only be provided in physical environments. According to Jung and Dieck (2017), virtual tourism can be a viable option when access to the physical environment is limited. Pandemic challenges accelerated digital transformation within the restaurant business. Tuomi et al. (2021) demonstrates the significance of technology and social media platforms in adapting to rapid change during in optimizing their resources and developing new approaches to maintain their market presence when lockdown reduced volume of operations and market size. The new technologies helped to overcome some of the challenges during pandemic (Ostrowska-Tryzno and Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2022). Our research results also confirm the significance of adapting new technological and operational strategies as solutions to gastronomy tourism suppliers in their operations. Contrarily, Vo-Thanh et al., 2022 indicates that digital interactions is not an optimal solution to provide a superior and memorable experience in fine-dining restaurants. So, it is crucial for restaurant management to consider their clientele while adapting the new technologies. Labor costs are among prime costs for restaurants, and by offering shorter menus, restaurants were able to improve labor productivity while reducing labor costs. (Yost et al., 2021). Our research findings suggest the emerge of new menu formats to manage costs. Cenni and Vásquez's (2020) found that during the Covid-19 era, individuals demonstrated interest in online cooking classes as a way to socialize, gather with friends and family, improve their cooking skills and feeling the sense of being transported to the origin country of the prepared dishes. In their research, Seyitoğlu and Atsız (2022) analyzed Trip Advisor reviews about distant gastronomic experience through online cooking classes and identified nine key dimensions of the distant gastronomic experience where “Characteristics and skills of service providers” and “distance celebration” come to the fore among mentioned dimensions. This illustrates the importance of service providers' qualities and attributes in delivering a high-quality experience, as well as the usefulness of online cooking classes in bringing friends, family, and peers together to celebrate a special occasion. Their research additionally indicated that gastronomic experiences could be possible and satisfactory through both in-person and online products. Our research results also foresee the lasting of online gastronomy experiences. However, it is uncertain whether people would be interested in virtual cooking classes once the pandemic ends. According to our research findings, consumer preference for off premises consumption (take away or home delivery) is anticipated to continue in the new normal. Food delivery services had a noteworthy rise in popularity rather than dine-in restaurants. For instance, compared to pre-pandemic days, France had a 24 percent increase in restaurant delivery consumers. Furthermore, over half of the Spanish respondents expressed their intention to continue using food delivery services even after the pandemic ends (Statista, 2022). Before the pandemic, customers were in demand of “immersive and amazing” experiences. However, post-pandemic, their demand shifted towards seeking reassurance, sociability, and unparalleled gastronomic experiences, along with a desire for experiential home service delivery (Bonfanti et al., 2023). Research results showed the necessity of government supply for the recovery of gastronomy

tourism industry. According to Neise et., al. (2021), it is difficult to assess the long-term benefits of the government support given to restaurants under the Corona aid program (such as loans and short-term working allowances), even though they improved the restaurants' short-term survival. Also, Neise et al., 2021 emphasizes the importance of having a well-established business as well as managers' experience and knowledge in overcoming crises similar to our findings. The practical contribution of this research is in understanding the pros and cons of Covid 19 impact on gastronomy tourism correlated with the need to address necessary changes and what has to remain. Based on findings, the initial recommendation for gastronomy tourism service providers is to plan their investments in technological applications with cautious, considering the sustained demand for on-site experiences and role of generations in technology acceptance. They should well analyze the demographic profile and motivations of their targeted clientele. Restaurants are advised to simplify their operations with one item menus, shortened menus, lower seating capacities and be volunteer for joint investments in order to overcome increased cost of operations and better inventory management. Additionally, gastronomy tourism stakeholders should adapt to changing gastronomy tourist motivations offering outdoor facilities, private dining rooms, seasonal menus, healthy menus, authentic restaurant concepts in natural environments and farm to table concepts. This research emphasizes the ongoing demand for off premises consumption (home delivery or take away) but notes potential cost fluctuations for home delivery services in near future. All policymakers and authorities should collaborate and act simultaneously for the recovery of gastronomy tourism. In order to overcome the shortage of qualified workforce in the industry, it is advised to gastronomy tourism supply resources to be in cooperation with gastronomy educational institutes through internship and on the job training practices. Gastronomy suppliers should more invest and focus on online marketing strategies to showcase their adaptation in "new normal" and benefit much from social media.

The originality of this research and its contribution to the literature is offering a holistic perspective by examining the perspectives of influencers on all aspects and stakeholders within gastronomy tourism. By aligning with gastronomy influencers' opinions, this research explores gastronomy tourism future in consideration with the effects of the Covid19 pandemic from a holistic perspective. The fact that the study data was collected in the late Covid period enabled more matured opinions about the process to be included in the research, providing a more specific perspective towards the future. The study is anticipated to contribute valuable suggestions and foresights for both gastronomy tourism stakeholders and current literature through its provided suggestions and foresight about evolvement of gastronomy tourism in the new normal.

The study has some limitations that could inspire future research. Firstly, identifying gastronomy influencers prioritizing gastronomy tourism over social media-related financial interests. Secondly, reaching and persuading these busy

influencers to participate proved difficulty; only 22 out of 50 initially contacted were interviewed due to non-responses or scheduling conflicts. Additionally, the ongoing pandemic led to some participants' discomfort with face-to-face interviews, necessitating online interviews. Lastly, the findings are limited to January and February 2022. Future research could overcome these limitations by exploring diverse perspectives and different timeframes for a wider picture.

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